

*After Meeting Muhammad Ali at Martini's Pizza Shop,  
Kalamazoo, Michigan, February, 1998*

*He's too ugly to be the champ. Look at me, I'm pretty.*

- Muhammad Ali

What needs to happen now  
Has little to do with accuracy,  
Or the mesmerization we feign  
For all the obvious reasons  
Regarding his single force:  
A magic trick that ends  
In his quivering left fist  
Holding a linen napkin  
That flutters like the resignation  
Of a touched butterfly.  
Let me remind you  
That our subsequent applause  
May invoke the old imprecations --  
"I am the greatest of *all* time;  
What's my name? What's my name!" --  
Even as the children continue  
To approach, as he hugs them  
For so long that we begin to sway  
A little with them, forgetting  
That our distance is still  
An exile from the first love.  
If I could stake my claim  
For once on the future tense,  
Where the stars refuse to emerge  
From the orange-flamed horizon  
To which we are attached,  
Where geometry will not soften  
For even God the Man,  
We would, with all our overdue respect,  
Approach him with our hats and gloves  
In one hand, and extend our other,  
To shake his hand,  
To tremble because of him,  
And with him.